THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

The Flume, by Louise Bogan - - - - - - - - - - -

Poems by John Crowe Ransom, Eda Lou Walton and others - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

On Proprieties in Sphinxes - - - - - - - -

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The Measure

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The Flume

I

SHE had a madness in her for betrayal.
She looked for it in every room in the house.
Sometimes she thought she must rip up the floor to find
A box, a letter, a ring, to set her grief,
So long a rusty wheel, revolving in fury.
But all that she ever found was the noise of water
Bold in the house as under the dam's flashboard,
Water as loud as a pulse pressed into the ears,
Steady as blood in the veins,—often she thought
The shout her own life,—that she did not listen and hear it.
The fields had gone to young grass, the syringa hung
Stayed by the weight of flowers in the moving morning.
The shuttered house held coolness as a core against
The hot steeped shrubs at its doors, and the blazing river.

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She in the house, when he had gone to the mill,
Tried to brush from her heart the gentlest kiss
New on her mouth. She leaned her broom to the wall,
Ran to the stairs, breathless to start the game
Of finding agony hid in some corner,
Tamed, perhaps, by months of pity, but still
Alive enough to bite at her hands and throat,
To bruise with a blue, unalterable mark
The shoulder where she had felt his breath in sleep
Warm her with its slow measure.

In a mirror
Reflecting a barrow by a neighbor's barn
And a weather-vane stopped between north and west
She saw her face, as she had thought to see it,
Tightened between the eyes. She sat down on the bed
So that a tree was thrust into the mirror
Behind her head, and moved there shadowless
Turning around her the green of its distant leaves.
She had her two eyes before her, giving her back
The young face, softly marred by its own derision,
A hand that settled combs in the heavy hair,
The willing mouth, kissed never to its own beauty
Because it strained for terror through the kiss,
Never quite shaped over the lover's name
Because that name might go.

The tree moved over
Its handsbreadth space, and gave some sky to the glass
Mixed with its leaves. Although the branch rushed loud
A field off, it was lost within the steady
Leap of the dam to the flume, made to a silence
She had heard it so long. Nothing against the cold
Beat of her own proud purpose was noise or power.
She had some guilt in her to be betrayed,
She had the terrible hope he could not love her.

II

The wind before storm was to her the wind before thunder.
She heard the break within it from the first.
She never was afraid to face the heavy
Sprout of the lightning, for one moment branched
Within the sultriness of the high pasture
A little like another tree for a moment
Gathering through the window not like danger.
She ran about to shut the windows, slammed
The doors that gaped along the wall like ears
And tried to keep herself from the first crash
To follow the stripped spasm that took root
On the rocky hill, in the field, or in the water.
She needed more than a house to keep it out.
She clung to the wall, and smelled the dusty paper
Beside her face, and counted out the figures
Into a spell, to keep her terror hushed,
And clenched herself so tightly that she thought
Nothing could make her hear that noise again,
And again heard, spun down throughout the valley
The spill from the long sky, over the roof,
Mounting as surely as the beats in pain.
The thunder was like agony, a smother
Against her life: she thought never to stand
Out in the free still air again, and buy
A loaf of bread out of the baker's cart,
Or cut the lamp-wicks in the early morning,
Or carry in the biggest lamp at night
Shining and clean under the china shade
To light the dishes of the supper table.

—Still—still—everything quieter then
Than the very earth escaping under the plough,
The depth beyond seed of the still and deep-layered ground
Stiller than rock, than the blackest base of rock,
Than the central grain crushed tight within the mountain.
It would be still again. She could say to-night
"There has been a storm," as though he hadn't heard
The hundred breaks within the murderous sky,
And he would say that thunder couldn't hurt her.
"There's been a storm," she would say, "Trees have been struck,
"Maybe a man stunned in an open field.
"The milk in the cows' udders curdled sour."

One woman frightened in a dusty corner
Who bit her fist and wished to pluck the thunder
From its swinging tree, to throw it down forever
Against the pastures it could not destroy,
And after the thunder, run and stop the dam,
The endless fountainous roar of falling water,
And scratch her heart free from the itching love
So much like sound, never spending itself,
Never still, in any quietest room.
The thunder ended. She could hear the others,
The water around the house like a shawly vine,
Love like a rough wind, mixing a branch's stems.
The thunder had stopped. Some day she could stand
Listening yet, with the others silent around her.

III

At night his calm closed body lay beside her
Beyond her will established in itself.
Barely a moment before he had said her name,
Giving it into sleep, had set the merciful
Bulwark of spare young body against the darkness.
Her hair swept over his shoulder, claiming him hers,
This fine and narrow strength, although her hands
May shut untenderly by her own side.
Her woman's flesh, rocking all echoes deep,
Strained out again toward ravenous memory.
He lies in sleep, slender, a broken seal,
The strong wrists quick no more to the strong hand,
The intent eyes dulled, the obstinate mouth kissed out.
Outside the dam roars. He is perhaps a child,
With a child's breath. He lies flexed like a child,
The strong ribs and firm neck may count for nothing.
She will think him a child. He is weak and he will fail her.
Again she remembers the girl on the edge of town
Who took her lovers out along autumn roads,
Under half-empty trees, and shouted her laughter
To hear an echo thinner, later than summer's,
Answer her from the fields. Again she remembers
The true hard cold that caught at the wild girl's body,
When night after night she felt the autumn break
And open the country she knew, when she gave her kisses
Beside rough field-stones piled into a wall
Cold as the wind in every particle.

She had been that girl, this woman in a house,
Who well might have no bed. He had given her walls
She wished to burn, his body she wished to tear
Ever upon the knife of another's body.
He was the dark, he was the house and sound.
One morning she saw how the first autumn had changed
The splayed repeated figures on the ground
Making them leaves, and not the shadow of leaves.

IV

She has been away. She shuts the heavy door
Against the stars of the late afternoon.
The fine fire in the kitchen warms the hall
And has turned the stove lids golden-red. Such burning!
O, equal to the terror of the cold
Biting itself outside, like a maddened thing,
Its tooth and fury matched. The lamp flames clearly
Against its glassed-in air. Nothing has changed.
Table and floor have been swept clean enough.
She pulls the frozen patch of veil from her mouth
And stands, like a stranger, muffled from the cold
To which she may return. Where is this treachery
That she has come home earlier to find
Wide in her house? It has not tracked the floors
Nor strewn crumbs on the shelves. It is hid away.

Begin to turn, you whirring stone in the breast;
Beat again, unsated pulse of fury.
He will soon be here. Give her before he comes
Whet to the blade. Lie open to her eye;
Rustle against her ear; give her mean glory
Of treason found outside the treacherous heart.
—No moon is close against the empty windows
To fill the cold hand of the air. The cold stairs murmur
In all their boards and nails, under her feet.
Her breath shows white over the lamp she carries
And sets by the bed. The panes shine back
As though there were nothing but a precipice
Beyond the wall, and the house itself a shelter
Held over space. She stands within the panes
As in the room, coated, the veil on her cheeks,
Save that there darkness streams behind her body
And through it. She almost knows the change
She could not know until now, so recently
The whistling cold outside beat down her sense.
But now she is snared. She tries to take a step
Toward the clumsily smoothed bed, and waits half-balanced,
Even her anger checked. Now all is over.
Her blood still beats, but everything else is still.
She stands in an empty room, in a silent room.
The ear has stopped. Great quietude spells the throb
Expected, because here the water sounded,
Because of it the bed and chairs stood here.

She stands here, too, because she once heard water
Night or day, go down in a bristling swing,—
Water now like stone over the dam,
And in the flume below, that once ran black
And marked its current with the earliest stalks
Of summer broken, the water might be the ground.
No longer the echo of frenzy bound on itself
Answers her from below. She and the mirror
Can play no longer together their bitter game.
Here now is silence, over the earth as beneath it,
The rim of the cymbal frozen, the drum gone slack.
And here at last the lust for betrayal breaks.
Her blood beats on, and her love with her blood
Beats back the staring coldness that would kill her,
Laying a palm over the ebb and return
Of her warm throat, heard now for the first time
Within this room. Soon he will find her,
Still dressed for flight, quiet upon his bed,
When he has hurried from the weighted cold
Toward the faint lamp upstairs. She will lie there
Hearing at last the timbre of love and silence.

Louise Bogan

Proud Heart Rained Upon

RAIN is a long susurrance; it is no loud
Clamor, yet mutes the terrible bugles; no night,
Yet darkens the insupportable sunlight
And flame-borrowing bush and feather; it is a cloud,
And cool upon your heads, poor wrinkle-browed
Percipiences! Not true Styx, yet a river
Washing the wounded senses of their fever;
Or like a wall let down, or like a blessed shroud.

Think of the happy dead men lying in ponds
Filled of rainwater—eyeballs rolling wide
In the comfort of the undusty unlit tide—
Ears flowered green and huge beyond the bawling
That shook the air of earth—tumbled, or crawling
On naked legs among the lily-fronds.

John Crowe Ransom

Counsel for Autumn

YOU who have walked the misted meadowlands,
And crushed their petalled colors of bright gold
And wine-surpassing carmines, on a tongue
Lusting for beauty as new-lighted brands
Lust for the flames they fold,

Dare yet the autumn gladly. Tracery
More intricate-lovely than the June woodbine
Each winter-barren tree shall hold to heaven
And fling on withered meadows. Shout, who see
Now not a green leaf shine

On any branches; there is come to you
Matter too great to trace in green and gold
Of tangible loveliness, but in a slight
And hieroglyphic shadow cast on dew
Beauty herself is told.

Burial

HAD I the green-and-silver laughter of the birch-tree,
The thousand dancing laughters of her lips,
Had I the milk-white fairness of her body,
The quiet of her brooding finger-tips,
I should be glad I'd lifted dark sod into the light,
And that the dust of women was sweet again
In me. I pray you then for my burial
Find out a birch. You shall have answer then.

Preference

SO shall I live, a ravelling brief smoke
Before the wind, and glut your eyes with brightness.
Let be these words of a poor foolish folk,
Unused to ecstasy, who make of ripeness

Eternal durance, and a paradise
Got by the snakes upon Medusa's head,
Immutable now forever. It's a price
Too great for heaven, where how should the shred

And filament of the air-stepping mist
Be lovely still, or hush itself to blue
Against the wintry sky? 'Twere best we kissed
Before the wind, and went as smoke-clouds do.

Anne Singleton

Wind Fear

"SOMEDAY," you said,
"I shall go
Quietly as to bed,
Leave off my body
As I leave this dress,
And my beautiful hair
Instead of your hand
Shall know the caress
Of the fingers of sand,
Someday."

So one day
You went
When the weeks of wind
Were spent
And three stars
Had come over the dune
Ahead of the moon.
Unto the desert you left
The delight of your flesh,
And your beautiful hair
To the creeping despair
Of the sand,
As you planned.

Only this you forgot
And are not
For all of your strategy
Free,
That the fingers of sand
May uncover
Your beautiful hair
To your lover,
That your delicate bones
May lie bare
And his eyes not see
You there
And his hand not know the dust
That was your hair.

Eda Lou Walton

Perspective

MY skin is slowly toughened by file of life;
Better one pain-hot moment, flayed with a knife,
Than contacts which corrode, companions who gnaw,
Ulcers of habit, blisters burnt by law.

But callouses grow thicker; and this skin
Some day will stiffen. Then I can draw in
My head; call it coffin, if you will;
No heaven shall harp me from a place so still.

Katherine Newton

For a Proud Lady

YOURS is a proud and fearful heart
That snares the weather in its mood,
As once you snatched the morning mists
All veils for your one maidenhood.

The snow is but a banner white
Run up by God for your defeat;
You take cold winter days to read
Fate patterned in indifferent sleet.

And sweeter weathers have no art
To dull this prophecy of harm;
You only watch the hare-bell's tilt
To hear instead its belled alarum.

Margaret Mead

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ACTING EDITOR: LÉONIE ADAMS

On Proprieties In Sphinxes

(Dionysus in Doubt, by Edwin Arlington Robinson; New York: Macmillan; 1924.)

IN this latest volume, as before, Mr. Robinson wears a species of archaic smile. That countenance which so became Leonardo's women, certain primitive saints, and the Sphinx of the Nile, has distinguished also the chronicler of Tilbury Town. In its features of melancholy unconcern, of somewhat diffident hauteur, of obscure and fated import, it sat miraculously upon his urbane derelicts and very eminent failures.

Apart almost from what he says, the quality is implicit in his technique; and it is a deft thing to accomplish in shadowy words this feat of plasticity, of line, and light and dark. The man has so to speak cast an expression over the page. To suggest that he put off his manner lightly, as he might a bodily cloak, would be an impertinence. Yet the inscrutable regard is not everywhere and impartially to be fixed.

In that Tilbury whose citadel is the Dark Tower a pregnant reserve was proper speech. A kind of quizzical glamour, like the touch of an austere romantic, was on its townsmen, creatures baffled and withdrawn. To no man, not to Mr. Robinson, is their vindica-

tion quite manifest; but of its absolute nature he has been marvelously suggestive.

In the four new dialogues there is no plain excuse in aesthetics, and none certainly in reason, for this desperate uncommunicativeness, for this reticence amounting to melodrama. Here what is to be said, is, if it is anything, plausible. In the best of these, *Mortmain,* one interlocutor, in a burst of reason, chides the other with having "come to be mysterious."

There is further quarrel with the Dionysus poems. For here with but the bleakest artistry, Mr. Robinson appears to unriddle himself. His mystic individualism, his perception of the subtle destinies of the luckless, his distaste in short for our democracy, these have better moved us hitherto. All that he here propounds in elegant enigma, has found symbol and artistic end in his earlier work. Worse than that, it has been given us elsewhere in many an utterance simpler and more vigorous. His meaning, in so far as it was peculiar and important, has been of the sort that "told the more the more it was not told." That awfully significant cast of countenance should not have patent explanation.

Here too for the most part the inner and tender cadence is quite gone. There remains only that brittle framework which stayed it from the slovenly and inept.

It would be unfair however to speak of these longer and presumably more important poems alone. The collection includes also a number of sonnets to be placed with his more distinguished work, and one at least notably lovely:

"THE SHEAVES

Where long the shadows of the wind had rolled,
Green wheat was yielding to the change assigned,
And as by some vast magic undivined
The world was turning slowly into gold;
Like nothing that was ever bought or sold
It waited there, the body and the mind,
And with a mighty meaning of a kind
That tells the more the more it is not told.

So in a land where all days are not fair,
Fair days went on till on another day
A thousand golden sheaves were lying there,
Shining and still, but not for long to stay—
As if a thousand girls with golden hair
Might rise from where they slept and go away."

Léonie Adams

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